

## Q&A with Kevin Costner: Star's Visalia roots helped drive him to 'McFarland, USA'

By Rick Bentley

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Kevin Costner, left, as coach Jim White and Carlos Pratts as team member Thomas Valles in "McFarland, USA."

RON PHILLIPS — DISNEY

LOS ANGELES — Kevin Costner likes sports movies because they combine the excitement of competition with the power of personal drama.

That was the case with "Field of Dreams," "Tin Cup," "Draft Day" and "Bull Durham."

Now he adds "McFarland, USA." Costner plays Jim White, a coach who starts a cross country team in the little farming town in the San Joaquin Valley and turns a group of young men with limited possibilities into state champions.

Costner connected with the story because he went to Mt. Whitney High School in Visalia, where he played baseball and remembers competing against McFarland. But it was a Sports Illustrated story that exposed him to the school's storied history.

**Question: Was it easy to relate to this story?**

**Answer:** I've grown up in Ventura and also in Visalia. And I've driven down these roads. And I saw people working in those fields. I played and fought and had friends where their families were – were pickers in Saticoy, a little Mexican barrio school that I went to. This is as American story as you can possibly have.

### **Is that why you wanted to make this movie?**

It's a great lesson to us, McFarland, that if we give our children, our young men, our young women goals, we let them see what's possible, they can exceed beyond their own wildest expectations. It's just a very good lesson, this movie.

### **How hard was it to play Jim White?**

I was proud to play the essence of Jim White. I'm not Jim White. You know, I think we'd all like to be Jim White in some way. But it was a pleasure to be able to do that, kind of from that Sports Illustrated article, make this giant circle to actually being in the movie.

### **Were there coaches like Jim White in your life?**

I've had two coaches. One was from Visalia. His name was Jim Barnett, a baseball coach. And he was a real help to me in a lot of ways. But there was a man that was very powerful. His name is Joe Vaughn (Buena High School, Ventura). And he's the winningest basketball coach in the state of California for girls' basketball. I was on the last boys team he coached.

### **How did Vaughn affect your life?**

I started to get in just a little bit of trouble in high school. He just took me off to the side and he said, "I thought you were a Jesus man." And I remember, I just looked at him and I started crying. It was like a guy that I really respected; I felt like I had disappointed him. I kind of got my act together.

### **Why the attraction to sports movies?**

I enjoy sports, but I enjoy sports so much to the point that I wouldn't do the movie unless I thought it had a chance to be good. That's how much I like them. I'm not dying to do a sports thing and have it just look average.

### **What keeps a sports movie from being average?**

If you want to make a great sports movie, don't put too much sports in it. It's the backdrop.

Contact Rick Bentley: [rbentley@fresnobee.com](mailto:rbentley@fresnobee.com), (559) 441-6355 or [@RickBentley1](https://twitter.com/RickBentley1) on Twitter.

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